

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Bald-faced hornets

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

At our oldest daughter's pre-school there's a nature table that brings artifacts of the natural world a little closer to the hands of three and four year olds. Scattered across the table are seeds, bones, crystals, and leaves. A parent recently brought in a new addition – small, round, paper hornet's nest.

These paper balls that simultaneously evoke aversion and curiosity are made by the bald-faced hornet, which isn't a true hornet, but a wasp found across much of North America and common here in the Southeast.

Each spring a queen wasp, whose eggs were fertilized the previous year, finds a spot for the nest and begins construction. Her first eggs become female workers, which then take over the task of expanding the nest and caring for young. The paper for the nest is made by chewing wood and mixing it with a starch found in the wasps' saliva. The inside of the nest looks much like other wasp nests with rows of hexagonal cells.

In the fall, all of the wasps die except for a few fertilized females which hibernate in a well-sheltered place. The nest will be abandoned, never be used again by the wasps. In the spring, the young females will emerge to become queens and fly off to start their own colonies.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.